

News from Ed Markey

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MARKEY BLASTS DOE DECISION SELECTING YUCCA MOUNTAIN AS NATION'S NUCLEAR WASTE REPOSITORY

WASHINGTON, D.C. --

Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA), senior member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, released a statement in anticipation of today's selection of Yucca Mountain as the nation's nuclear waste repository by the Department of Energy. The House Energy and Commerce Committee has jurisdiction over the Department of Energy and Rep. Markey has been a vocal critic of the process used to select the repository.

Rep. Markey said, "Over the last fifty years, our nation has generated tens of thousands of tons of plutonium, enriched uranium, and other highly radioactive nuclear materials and wastes. The problem of finding a solution to the disposal of these deadly wastes is a grave one. The need to do so in the safest and most responsible fashion is obvious -- the failure to do so will subject future generations to possible lethal exposures for tens of thousands of years to come."

"Sadly, today's decision by Secretary Abraham to select Yucca Mountain to be the nation's permanent waste repository is based on politics, not sound science. This decision continues a pattern at the Department of Energy that goes back many years."

"As Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Energy Conservation and Power during the mid-1980s, I became intimately acquainted with the bad starts, false starts and mis-starts that wracked DOE's management of this program. During this period, the Department of Energy put politics first and safety last. In some instances, the Department simply ignored environmental problems at potential sites for a permanent waste repository, such as Hanford, Washington, when it thought this site might be the most politically viable. In other instances, it "cooked the books" to gain outcomes it wanted. For example, a site in New Hampshire was struck from the list because President Reagan's political advisors didn't want this issue coming up during the New Hampshire Presidential primary. Sites in North Carolina were struck because former Representative John Broyhill (R-NC), then the Ranking Member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, was running for the Senate and didn't need the threat of his state becoming the nation's nuclear waste dump looming over his campaign."

"Other sites were struck because of the political clout of their congressional delegations. The salt domes in Louisiana came off the list because then-Senate Energy Committee Chairman Bennett Johnston (D-LA) would never have allowed his state to become a nuclear waste dump. A potential site in Deaf Smith County, Texas came off because former House Speaker Jim Wright (D-TX) and other members of the Texas Congressional delegation fought it."

"Over the years, key decisions were not supported by the scientific data. Methodologies were manipulated to get the desired findings. Key records and documents often have turned up missing or destroyed. As a result, public confidence in this program has evaporated."

"Congress added insult to injury with enactment of the 1987 amendments to the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, which abandoned any pretense of exploring multiple sites to ensure that selection of a permanent waste repository would be based on the soundest scientific footing, and only after a full-scale review of all the options and all the available data on safety, environmental, and public health concerns. Instead, the Congress made a political decision to limit the search for a permanent nuclear waste dump to the Yucca Mountain site -- thereby taking the remaining 98 Senators and 433 Representatives off the hook and handing the nuclear Queen of Spades to the State of Nevada. We then instructed DOE and the NRC to go forth and determine whether our political decision was scientifically supportable."

"Today's decision takes away any remaining pretense that we are selecting the waste repository based on sound science and technology. On December 14, 2001, the DOE tried to let themselves off the geologic hook by changing the Yucca Mountain evaluation criteria to include human engineered containment systems as well as natural geologic isolation. Congress explicitly required the decision to be based on geologic characteristics in the 1982 Nuclear Waste Policy Act. But when DOE's scientists found that they could not meet the geology standard, the Bush Administration simply changed the rules - and broke the law. Now they are expressing increased confidence in containers made out of an alloy that their own scientists have demonstrated can corrode within a year. This is the worst kind of Pick-a-Mix science."

"Moreover, we now know from DOE's own Inspector General that Winston and Strawn, the law firm hired by DOE to analyze the Department's license application for Yucca Mountain, was simultaneously working for both the Nuclear Energy Institute and TRW Environmental Safety Systems, Inc., the former primary contractor at Yucca Mountain, and had failed to disclose this fact until press reports began circulating about its conflicts-of-interest. Clearly, this is a situation in which the nuclear fix is in."

"It's time for DOE to go back to the drawing board and come up with a site-selection process that the public can have confidence in and that will assure that these deadly radioactive wastes will not threaten public health or the environment."

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